



Office of Senator Phil Williams
10th District

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THE CURRENT DISCUSSION ON SUNDAY ALCOHOL SALES IS INCORRECTLY FRAMED

Gadsden – The current discussion of Sunday alcohol sales has been incorrectly framed. To say that this is a purely “religious” issue is a convenient fabrication – a smoke screen – to mask the fact that proponents of the topic have utterly failed to make a compelling, professional and fact-based case. Matters of faith should certainly be a part of the discussion. This is largely a conservative Christian community. Those beliefs should not be ignored and I for one will not do so. The proponents of this call have failed to acknowledge the correct framing of the matter – that Sunday alcohol sales is in fact a “divisive social issue” and the citizens of this area deserve better than what they have been getting from the proponents of Sunday sales thus far.

I have a broad-based constituency and I am currently hearing that just as many of my citizens and local leaders are opposed to Sunday sales as those that are for it. Since what is being asked for by proponents of this divisive issue is for a change to existing law then the burden is on them to do a better job to present their case. It is not reasonable for them to claim to represent the whole Gadsden metro area and yet completely ignore that a large portion of their base have yet to be convinced. A review of the historical record in the press shows that this issue arises in brief spats every four years, but has never gained enough support to move forward. Again, this is a divisive issue and therefore should be given a higher level of professionalism by those whose job it is to make the case. I am committed to dialogue on this issue but I have been given nothing but rhetoric to work with.

Currently, the local legislative delegation is more conservative and united than ever before in the history of Etowah County politics. We all represent this area, and to demand a change on a divisive local issue without so much as a formal resolution from local leaders is difficult to fathom. We are working hard to create an environment that brings real jobs to this area and to retain those that we have now. My belief is that the driving force of any economy is going to be jobs first. If the citizens of this area have disposable income because they are working at sustainable jobs then businesses will locate here. The Commercial Development Authority and the Chamber of Commerce have made unsubstantiated intermittent calls for Sunday sales. But the burden is on them first to make their case. To sit back and say that life would be better if the legislative delegation would just unilaterally sweep aside a long-standing law in spite of the fact that vast numbers of our constituents disagree is absolutely the opposite of what should take place. The proponents should first acknowledge the divisiveness of the issue and work on their end to adequately present their position with facts, with broader scope, and with more respect to the community at large.

In three years I've received one call from the Chamber on this issue. It came while I was in Montgomery during the middle of the last session. I've not heard from the Chamber on this matter since and that was over six months ago. The Gadsden City Council has never presented the current delegation with a unified resolution calling for Sunday Sales. The Etowah County

Commission has never passed a resolution in favor of making this change. The Commercial Development Authority has not presented an economic impact study nor have they been willing to present the names of businesses that we have allegedly lost because of our current law. Since this is a locally generated matter all of that activity is supposed to take place first, and then the delegation should be called upon with a proposed piece of legislation.

I have been told that this is just about giving the citizens the right to vote on the matter. I believe that we have not even reached that point in the discussion yet. The proponents owe this community a clear view of what they are being asked to vote upon. Before this community is hit with a divisive issue they deserve to be treated with respect and told “why it is important” and “how it will make a difference”.

I am calling on the Commercial Development Authority and the Chamber of Commerce to hold public hearings and gather input. I am also asking for them to provide an economic impact study on this issue that is specific to this area, complete with data on businesses who have indicated interest in coming here if the law is changed. I am familiar with the fact that non-disclosure agreements may protect some of that information but I also know that every such agreement contains a clause that states that those who are necessary to the decisions to be made can be included as long as they are willing to be bound to the agreement themselves. I am willing. Once they have done so I am asking for the Board of the Chamber and the representatives of the Authority to pass resolutions that outline their findings and their proposed way forward. I am also calling for the Gadsden City Council and the Etowah County Commission to lead on this issue by passing a formal resolution from each body that informs the delegation what they know that their constituents want. If they believe that the citizens who elected them want Sunday alcohol sales then it is only reasonable that they should be willing to unite as elected bodies and represent those communities publically.

This is not just a religious issue, and it is not just an economic issue. It is a divisive social issue and the citizens of this area have a right to expect more from those who are demanding a change to our way of life.